

Selectmen Defend Removal of Ribbons

By SUSANNA SHEEHAN
and KEITH L. MARTIN

Selectmen stood firm on their decision to remove yellow ribbons located in the woods at Round Pond at their Monday meeting.

On August 23, Duxbury selectmen will hear a request from the American Legion to allow the memorial to fallen soldiers in Iraq to continue after being torn down last week.

During their open forum on Monday night, selectmen listened to comments on the town's recent actions regarding yellow ribbons that bore the names of 632 soldiers and others killed in the war in Iraq placed on trees on town-owned conservation land.

Bill Newman of the American Legion asked that selectmen allow the memorial's installers, Ed Hardy and Heather Hardy of East St. and their friend Jason Anthony, permission to tie 250 more ribbons to trees at Round Pond off Mayflower St. He also requested that this tribute to fallen troops and others stay on the trees until Veteran's Day on November 11. Newman said the American Legion Veterans could then conduct Veterans Day services on that site.

Newman said the American Legion was not involved in the memorial, but felt it could be in the future.

"I thought this idea was



Selectmen Chairman Andre Martecchini said that he ordered the ribbons to be cut down as he and the other selectmen saw it as a political statement that no one asked permission to post.

tremendous and I still do," said Newman of Pine Point Rd. "It was wrong of them not to get permission, but the town was wrong in doing what they did by taking them down so quickly. The town owes them a public apology."

"Ed started this in May," Newman continued. "I only came out in the *Clipp* on Wednesday and by Saturday, they were down. I knew nothing about it. I apologize to Ed and his family."

Heather Hardy defended the memorial to selectmen.

"Some say the woods are not an appropriate place," said Heather Hardy. "I can't think of a more appropriate place. The woods give us the opportunity to be still. We have time

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to think. The memorial reminds us there is a war going on right now. The quiet is so penetrating. When I walk through the woods I feel a connection. Through this, I felt I was truly honoring the soldiers."

Selectmen Chairman Andre Martecchini explained his decision to have the town workers remove the ribbons from the trees.

"I was informed of the memorial about three weeks ago," he said. "Our first reaction was that it is clearly inappropriate to put something like that without our permission on town property. We were asked to put the [wooden] cows for the O'Neil farm [purchase] on town property and we said no. Not because we didn't like the cows but because we felt it was inappropriate to put a political statement on town property. We debated about what to do about it [the ribbons]. We tried to find out who did it. I made the decision as chairman of the board to remove it and I told Joe Grady. I feel it was the right decision. We had asked that the material be saved. I can't explain why it got thrown out. It was not our intent to disrespect it."

Martecchini said selectmen and other town officials used the rationale that if they allowed this type of memorial on town property then they would have to let another group use town property for a different cause, and they didn't want to set that precedent.

"We want to avoid a situation where public property becomes used by every advocacy group," said Selectman John Tuffy.

Town Manager Rocco Longo said that after learning

of the memorial he consulted with people such as Bill Newman, and the town let the ribbons stay for 30 days.

Longo took responsibility for the conservation commission interns who threw away the box of ribbons instead of taking them to town hall.

Longo said he saw the ribbons on the trees, although none of the three selectmen did.

After selectmen closed the matter for discussion man in the room left the meeting. Anthony called the proceedings "pathetic" while Ms. Hardy was equally disappointed.

"It's sad that they were so closed to the deeper part of what this was all about and so set in their rules," she said. "What's really going to make a difference is if the entire town gets involved with this. Those woods belong to the town, belongs to the people not only those three selectmen."

Susan Curtis of High Street, who attended the meeting to support Hardy, said she was so upset that none of the selectmen had seen the memorial for themselves, but instead "took the word of one or two people."

"I think that that is so incredible...I'm still in shock," said Curtis.

As for Mr. Hardy, he said he was so disheartened after hearing firsthand from selectmen that he might not even attend their August 23 meeting, where the group will hear from the American Legion about how to continue the tribute.

"This is a power thing," he said. "None of them had seen it. If it were a 'political statement' like they said it was, why would I hide it? I'm just discouraged by the whole thing."



As Ed Hardy looks on, American Legion Commander William Newman asks selectmen to restore the yellow ribbons at Round Pond and have it be the centerpiece of Veterans Day ceremonies this November.